

AlumSpeaks

In conversation with Ms. Lata Pillai

SIMSR Alum Batch 1986-88

Director- Deutsche Bank



Q. What was the most significant learning you gained during your time at SIMSR?

A. The program and the curriculum helped to gain a different worldview. The projects, industrial experiences, working with people, help develop an attitude for the real world. The peer learning is an essential part, and helped exploring the vast set of possibilities we have in life. It actually does not teach much but hones us to look differently at the world around us.

Q. In your career of over three decades, what have been some important turning points?

A. I started working with ICICI in 1988, where I setup the home financing front and had a great stint with retail banking. There I worked on Market Analysis, then with Stressed Assets and Real Estate. So, within ICICI only it was like working with 3-4 organizations. Then deciding to leave it after 18 years and moving to Deutsche was a very apprehensive move. Was used to the culture and ways of ICICI, which was a domestic organization. Deutsche, being a foreign org, had to unlearn a lot of things and learn new ones. Here I look after capital markets, structured finances mainly in Real estate. I have got the inside view of what happens in those markets and the experience has been wondrous. I have witnessed the 1991 liberalization of markets and also the 2008 financial crisis firsthand, and both have been very valuable experiences.

Q. What are your most memorable moments at SIMSR?

A. There were several very memorable times. We are a pretty close batch, we keep in touch even after almost 30 yrs. We remember all the workshops and the picnics, treks and trips to Khandala we had. Prof. Gondlekar, who taught us productivity management, was great fun. Then, I also met my future husband in SIMSR, so it was all in all a very memorable journey.

Q. We see Ms. Chanda Khocchar, Ms. Arundhati Bhattacharya, Ms. Shikha Sharma, you, what is your opinion about working women?

A. I would say that women definitely have to put a lot more work in their stride to the top. They have to make several trade-offs and at times fail at one front or the other. But in such times, they need a great support system, either their parents, or husband or kids and also the ability to decide which things have to be let go off when. Organizations today are also helping with their policies and the mentality of the people is also changing. But women certainly persevere more.

Q. You have worked closely with both Mr. KV Kamath and Ms. Chanda Kochar. How would you describe the difference in their working styles?

A. Mr. Kamath was a visionary. He foresaw what many could not. Whereas Chanda is a great manager. She is a great delegator, listener, debater, quick in her decisions and a wonderful implementer. There is no small talk with her, very to the point conversations. You never went to her with just the problem, but take the solution also and ask her suggestions. Both were complementary people but were present at the correct time for the organization to take it forward.

Q. Recently PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi said that today's MBA programs are "outdated". What is your opinion on the same?

A. MBA programs prepare us for the real world mentally but they cannot teach everything. There are many things we must learn on the job and align ourselves with the culture of the company. I feel Indian MBA programs must have more of case studies as it will help the students understand how the concepts they have learned are being implemented practically. The more you know what happens in real world, the better equipped you are, rather than having bookish knowledge.

Q. How do you handle stress?

A. Listening to Music, meditating, spending time with my son and husband, who always gives me a very different and detached view of things, as he is not from finance background, which helps to understand the situation from another point of view.

Q. Any advice you would like to give the students of SIMSR?

A. Don't spoil your today thinking too much about tomorrow. Life is a great equalizer in the long run. If you are sincere and hardworking, you will get justice at the right time. Today things around us are changing very rapidly, so always be receptive and ready to adapt, keep yourself abreast and develop your competency. Be focused, Be patient, Be adaptive.

Q. Suggestions to Alumni Committee as to how they can improve their alumni relations?

A. It is doing a good job with all the new initiatives. We as alumni also feel that we should be contributing more time to our college. With our busy schedules, it does become a bit difficult to take time out.

Interviewed and drafted by ALCOM Members-

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